

Montreal

Thousands rally in downtown Montreal to protest Quebec's mandatory mask rules

The vast majority of the protesters did not wear masks

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Protesters chanted "liberté" as they marched from the main gates of McGill University on Sherbrooke Street to the CBC/Radio-Canada building on René-Lévesque Boulevard. (Jean-Claude Taliana/Radio-Canada)



Thousands of demonstrators marched through downtown Montreal Saturday to protest against the Quebec government's mandatory mask regulations.

The protesters — the vast majority of whom did not wear masks — carried signs and wore T-shirts with slogans announcing a variety of motivations and ideologies in opposition to face coverings.

Some demanded freedom, some were critical of the Coalition Avenir Québec government, Premier François Legault or public health director Dr. Horacio Arruda, and others espoused various theories about COVID-19 and U.S. politics.

"I find it illogical," said Nathalie Warren, who travelled from Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu for the protest.

"Say we go into a restaurant," she said. "We walk in wearing a mask, because, what, COVID is there? Then we sit down and we can take the masks off because, what, the COVID is gone?"

Under the government's regulations, masks are mandatory in restaurants when clients are moving around because it is harder to maintain a physical distance from others in those instances, provincial health authorities have said.

When a client is seated, [they may remove their mask](#) as long as they are at a two-metre distance from others.

"We want our liberty. We want the right to say yes to a vaccine. We want the right to decide. It's our life, it's our bodies, it's up to us," said Warren.

"I'm not OK with children going to school wearing masks, and physical distancing," said Irène Sarmiento. "It makes no sense. The children aren't to blame. The population is being abused."





The protesters carried signs indicating a variety of motivations and ideologies in opposition to face coverings. (Jean-Claude Taliana/Radio-Canada)

There were frequent spontaneous chants of "*liberté*" as the march wound from the main gates of McGill University on Sherbrooke Street to the CBC/Radio-Canada building on René-Lévesque Boulevard. Montreal police surveyed the event from motorcycles and bicycles.

At previous anti-mask protests in the province, demonstrators argued that mandatory mask rules are not fair and that the threat of COVID-19 is not as serious as is being reported.

On Saturday, some people made a show of embracing each other or exchanging double-cheek kisses. During speeches at the end, there were loud cheers for suggestions the mask law had no scientific basis and was instead an effort to control the population.

The science on masks and COVID-19, however, is now quite clear. Since the start of the pandemic, scientists have learned more about asymptomatic carriers and how the virus could spread through airborne particles.

[Public health experts note](#) that you should wear a cloth face covering not to protect yourself, but to protect those physically close to you by reducing the chance some of your respiratory droplets come into contact with them.

A [recent study](#), which looked at research carried out in 16 countries on six continents, concluded that "wearing face masks protects people (both health-care workers and the general public) against infection by these coronaviruses, and that eye protection could confer additional benefit."

- [Deputy premier seeks to rally young Quebecers as COVID-19 cases rise](#)

On July 27, responding to protests the previous weekend, Deputy Premier Geneviève Guilbault said there would be "consequences" if there continued to be incidents where people "transgress the rules of public health."

"It has nothing to do with taking away anyone's right to protest or express themselves," Guilbault said. "It's obvious that anybody can protest. But nobody has the right to put anyone else's health in danger."

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